



Department
for Education

Deployment of Teaching Assistants in schools

Research Report

June 2019

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ASK Research

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Acknowledgements

We would like to thank staff at the schools that participated in this research for their time and invaluable contribution.

Also we are grateful for the support of the team at the Department for Education.

We were supported in this work by Rob Webster and Dr Amelia Roberts both from the UCL Centre for Inclusive Education. We are incredibly grateful for their involvement and insightful input.

Executive Summary

Teaching Assistants (TAs) account for around a quarter (28%) of the overall state-funded school workforce (DfE, 2018). In recent years, research has begun to examine how TAs can be deployed effectively (Sharples et al., 2015). This research has shown that TAs who are sufficiently trained and used correctly within the classroom – for example, as a supplement to teachers and not a replacement – can have a positive impact on pupil engagement and attainment. Wider evidence also suggests that TAs can have a positive impact on academic achievement, however, effects vary (Blatchford et al., 2009). Despite this work, there is little up-to-date evidence of how schools actually do deploy and allocate TAs, what TAs are doing inside and outside of the classroom and what is informing schools' decision-making on how and where TAs are deployed.

This exploratory qualitative research was commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) in order to understand more about TA deployment in schools. Specifically, the research sought to: explore models of deployment in a range of primary and secondary mainstream schools in England; understand the factors affecting TA deployment; and identify any reasons for changes in TA deployment (both historical and those planned for the future).

The findings are based on 60 semi-structured qualitative telephone interviews with headteachers or nominated members of staff (e.g. deputy/assistant headteachers, senior leadership team members, or special educational needs co-ordinators (SENCO)) in 30 primary and 30 secondary schools in England. Interviews took place in October and November 2018. Participating schools reflected a range of characteristics including: maintained and academy school status; region (including London and non-London schools); Ofsted rating; number of pupils; proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) and proportions recorded as having special educational needs and disability (SEND).

Key findings

A total headcount of 922 TAs were reported to be employed across the 60 schools participating in this research. Half of the schools employed a Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTAs), with 80 HLTAs in total being employed across these 30 schools. A third of participating schools (nineteen) reported that they currently had vacant TA posts, while twelve schools reported they were using temporary staff from an agency or 'bank' system.

Models of TA deployment

There were three main ways in which TAs were described by school respondents as being primarily deployed:

1. Whole-class TAs

Deployment of TAs as a general support to the whole class was the common mode of deployment stated by primary schools. No secondary schools reported allocation of TAs in this way. Primary school respondents explained that whole class TAs were used to provide an extra adult within the classroom to support the teacher to meet the wide range of needs and abilities in a group of young children. They were reported as supporting learning, breaking work down and personalising it to pupils' needs. Often the TA rotated around different groups of pupils, as did the teacher. This meant pupils of all abilities got some time with a teacher and some time with a TA.

2. In-class targeted TAs

Allocating TAs for targeted in-class support was the most commonly reported mode of deployment by secondary schools and the second most common method of TA deployment by primary schools. In-class targeted TAs were primarily being deployed as a specific resource to support pupils with special educational needs (SEND). This included both those with Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans and those on special educational needs (SEN) support. In-class targeted TAs were also reported as being deployed to provide support for pupils with English as an Additional Language (EAL), Looked After Children (LAC) or those with other identified barriers to learning. In-class targeted TAs were carrying out similar tasks to whole-class TAs in the way they provided support in the classroom. But, in addition, they were being deployed for further support, such as differentiating or deliver lesson content, managing pupil behaviour and anxiety issues, and to implementing coping strategies for specific pupils. TAs were deployed as a means to provide 'additional input' stipulated in pupils' EHC plans.

3. Withdrawal intervention delivery

Primary and secondary schools also reported deploying TAs to withdraw pupils for intervention delivery. Interventions took place either *in addition* to class taught lessons (such as lunchtime or tutor time) or *instead of* class taught lessons (such as withdrawing pupils from Modern Foreign Language lessons or alternating withdrawal from different subjects or lessons). TAs deployed for intervention delivery were allocated to pupils with identified needs. This was predominantly pupils with EHC plans, those on SEN Support, with EAL, LAC, those attracting pupil premium, and those with Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) issues. The main interventions detailed were bespoke activities (to prepare for or reinforce work done in class) and bought in evidence-based interventions (for numeracy or literacy). Interventions were also used as a means to address specific areas of need (such as for speech and language or occupational therapy, SEMH pupils) and to support independence and inclusion.

Although primary and secondary schools gave an indication of the main mode of TA deployment, in reality most schools stated that they were using their TA workforce flexibly across these different roles.

Additional tasks being carried out by TAs

As well as being deployed to support teaching and learning in the ways detailed above, TAs were also reported by interviewees as routinely carrying out other tasks. For example, where TAs were used to support pupils with SEND, other tasks included evidence gathering (for plan development), target-setting, resource preparation and SENCO support. TAs were also described as providing personal support for pupils with mobility issues or those requiring personal care (including toileting) and to support those with medical needs (by monitoring medical equipment or administering medication, for example). Schools reported that they were also deploying TAs in other supervisory roles, such as after-school clubs, lunchtime supervision and lesson cover.

TA Employment

Reports of TAs contracts varied from: full- or part-time; for twelve months of the year or term-time only; permanent or temporary; and whether they were to work purely with a specifically named pupil or not. Typically, TAs were reported as being employed for an additional 15 minutes either side of the start and end of the school day. Contracts differed in terms of whether or not time was formally included for TAs to attend staff meetings, training events and to plan, prepare and liaise with teaching staff. Time for planning and preparation ranged from being fitted in during the school day to giving TAs set PPA time as a formal part of their timetable. Typically, TAs were expected to have GCSE or equivalent qualifications in English and Maths, though some schools had TAs qualified to degree level. Several schools reported supporting TAs moving into teacher training.

Benefits and challenges of TA deployment

A range of perceived benefits of TA deployment were reported by those interviewed. These included providing additional support for teaching and learning to the whole class; supporting classroom management and pupils with SEND; and reducing teacher workload. Additionally perceived benefits cited included greater pupil progress and attainment, independence and adult to child interaction. Whole school benefits of TA deployment were also reported as being a cost-effective staffing resource for covering absence and teachers' planning, preparation and assessment time, and to provide wraparound care and outdoor learning activities, for example.

Reported challenges to deploying TAs centred on the practicalities of covering TA absence and providing them with training and planning opportunities. A number of sector-wide challenges around TA deployment were also reported by participating schools, predominantly centred around perceived funding constraints (in terms of ability to deploy sufficient TAs to support all children with identified needs), low levels of TA pay due to limited funding and a lack of consistent training and career progression opportunities. These issues, according to those interviewed, present challenges for the recruitment and retention of TAs and the extent to which schools can deploy them in ways that they feel are effective. Some schools also reported concerns about parental expectations around

TA support for their child. Parents may expect a TA to be employed full-time to work with their child specifically whereas, in reality, support may be provided across groups of pupils or more fluidly, or only in particular lessons.

Changes in TA numbers and deployment

Over half (38) of the 60 schools participating reported reducing the number of TAs they employed in the last 2-3 years or planning to reduce numbers in the coming academic year. A total of 11 schools reported an increase and 11 reported TAs numbers as remaining static. Decreases in TA numbers were due to schools not replacing TAs who had left, as well as restructuring and rationalisation processes. Increases in TA numbers were reported as being due to significant increases in pupils on roll or significant increases in groups targeted for support.

Factors affecting decision-making

While schools reported using evidence from literature and external consultants on effective TA deployment, as well as analysis of pupil progress data, to inform decisions about how and where to deploy TAs, the extent of pupil need and the availability of funding to resource that need were the main factors affecting their TA numbers and allocation. Schools reported having to balance available TA resource with the needs of pupils they had identified as requiring support or intervention. They stated they were having to achieve this by: adult;; grouping pupils with identified needs into one class and sharing the TA resource amongst them; focusing TA input to cover the year groups with the highest needs; and by reducing TAs' planning and preparation time in favour of contact time with pupils.

Conclusions

This research indicates that TAs are being deployed for a wide range of complex and interconnected functions to support teaching and learning in mainstream primary and secondary schools in England. Many schools reported having rationalised the number of TAs they employed and had taken steps to ensure the available TA resource was being used efficiently and effectively. However, a majority of schools reported that they need to make further changes to their TA deployment as a result of funding constraints, and expressed concerns about the impact of this. School respondents reported being aware and concerned that the responsibility for appropriately supporting and progressing their most vulnerable learners was often being given to the least educationally skilled and lowest paid members of staff.

This research only captured the views of senior leaders. More research would be needed to capture the views of teachers and TAs themselves, and to determine if the ways schools report TA deployment is actually translating into classroom practice, whether this is effective, and how effective practice identified can be more widely shared.

Section 1: Background and Methodology

In November 2017, the headcount for Teaching Assistants (TAs) working in state-funded schools in England was 381,500. This accounted for 28% of the overall school workforce in full-time equivalents (DfE, 2018). Of these (based on headcount figures):

- 72% were based in primary/nursery settings.
- 16% were based in secondary schools.
- 12% were based in state-funded special schools, such as special schools, Alternative provision (APs) and Pupil Referral Units (PRUs).

Whilst it is known that TAs are being deployed in different ways in schools (DfE, 2014), there is little recent evidence of exactly how schools deploy and allocate TAs and what specific tasks TAs carry out both inside and outside the classroom. There is also little evidence on what is informing schools' decisions regarding TA deployment and information being used to inform TA deployment strategies, or the status TAs have in schools and their opportunities for professional development.

Previous research and guidance from the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) has shown how TAs can be deployed effectively (Sharples et al., 2015). They found, for example, that TAs who are sufficiently trained and used correctly within the classroom – for example, as a supplement to teachers and not a replacement – can have a positive impact on pupil engagement and attainment. Wider evidence suggests that TAs can have a positive impact on academic achievement. However, effects vary (Blatchford et al., 2009).

The DfE sought to understand more about how TAs are being deployed by schools to support teaching and learning, and the reasons affecting the models of deployment used. The focus of this qualitative study was to describe and understand how TAs are organised to support teaching and learning in a range of schools and the factors affecting schools' decisions about how, where and for whom TAs provide that support.

Aims

The aims of the qualitative research were to:

- Explore and describe TA deployment in a range of mainstream primary and secondary schools in England;
- Understand factors affecting this deployment;
- Identify any reasons for changes in TA deployment (both historical and those planned for the future).

The scope of the research was to explore TA deployment from key stage 1 upwards. The early years foundation stage was not covered in this research.

Sample

The DfE provided the research team with characteristics and contact details for a sample of 409 schools. These were stratified by school phase and by region (London vs. non-London).

All of the sample was initially contacted by the research team by email, followed by telephone where applicable, to invite them to opt-in to participating in the research.

The aim was to achieve a sample that reflected a wide range of school characteristics in terms of phase, region, Ofsted rating, SEND population and TA numbers. The achieved sample was not intended to be representative of the entire school population, but rather to present this range of characteristics.

Achieved sample

A total of 60 telephone interviews were conducted. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with senior leaders and SENCOs/Inclusion Managers in 30 primary schools and 30 secondary schools in England. These schools reflected a wide range of characteristics including Ofsted rating, London versus non-London, urban or rural location, number of pupils, proportions of pupils eligible for free school meals (FSM) and proportions of pupils recorded as having special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) register in census returns.

Table 1.1 Characteristics of achieved sample

Characteristic	Primary	Secondary
Ofsted rating	Outstanding = 9 Good = 17 Good (from recent RI) = 2 Requires Improvement = 2	Outstanding = 9 Good = 14 Good (from recent RI) = 1 Requires Improvement = 6
Region	London = 7 Non-London = 23	London = 10 Non-London = 20
Number of pupils on roll	<100 = 2 101-200 = 3 201-400 = 14 401-800 = 10 >800 = 1	<500 = 2 501-1000 = 11 1001-1500 = 10 1501-2000 = 6 >2000 = 1
Type	LA Maintained = 20 Academy = 10	LA Maintained = 3 Academy = 27
Proportion of pupils eligible for FSM (%)	<5 = 8 5.1-10 = 6 10.1-20 = 10 20.1-40 = 5 >40 = 1	<5 = 10 5.1-10 = 7 10.1-20 = 8 20.1-40 = 5
Proportion of pupils with SEND, including with EHC plans (%)	<5 = 7 5.1-10 = 6 10.1-15 = 9 15.1-20 = 3 20.1-30 = 5	<5 = 6 5.1-10 = 12 10.1-15 = 9 15.1-20 = 1 20.1-30 = 2
Total	30	30

Methodology

Interviews were carried out by telephone and lasted between 30-65 minutes. The headteacher of the school was invited to be the respondent, or to nominate a member of the Senior Leadership Team (SLT) who could answer our questions on their behalf.

Respondents were asked about:

- Numbers of TAs in their school.
- Deployment of TAs – the tasks and activities being undertaken, with which cohorts of pupils, whether responsibilities varied between TAs, and how this aligned with other school support staff.
- Factors influencing decisions on TA deployment – including but not limited to funding, pupil cohorts, evidence, skills sets.
- Recruitment, line management, training and contractual status of TAs.
- Changes to TA deployment – both in the past and future.
- Benefits and challenges of deploying TAs in their school.

Those who participated included headteachers, senior leaders and school Special Educational Needs and Disability Co-ordinators (SENCOs) or Heads of Inclusion. The Heads of Inclusion and SENCOs were often, but not always, members of SLT.

Table 1.2. Interview respondents by job role

	Primary	Secondary
Headteacher / Principal	23	15
Assistant / Deputy Head	1	4
SENCO / SEN Manager	7	12

* Totals are greater than number of schools interviewed as some interviews were conducted with multiple respondents.

All of the fieldwork was carried out over a short period during October and November 2018. In line with common qualitative research practice, the topic guide was used to inform a semi-structured interview. This frequently involved asking an open question at first but then directly prompting on specific issues in some cases (see Annex for the topic guide). All interviews were written up and coded using a Framework approach (Ritchie et al., 2013). This identified common themes and practices shared by these schools, which this report details.

Regarding this report's structure, **section two** reports on numbers of TAs employed in schools (as detailed by respondents), models of deployment, cohorts of pupils being supported and tasks being carried out by TAs. **Section three** details the reported recruitment and contractual arrangements of TAs, their management and skills. **Section four** explores the factors affecting decision-making around TA deployment and any recent changes in numbers. **Section five** reports the benefits and challenges of having TAs in schools, as outlined by respondents. Finally, **section six** presents the conclusions.

Section 2: How are schools allocating and deploying TAs?

Respondents within participating schools were asked how many TAs they have in their school, their roles and responsibilities, cohorts of pupils they are supporting, model of deployment, and the types of activities and tasks that TAs undertake.

Numbers of TAs

A total of 922 TAs were reported to be employed across the 60 schools interviewed. Details of the number of TAs employed in each school by primary and secondary phases are provided in Table 2.1.

Table 2.1: Number of TAs (headcount) reported to be employed in each school by phase

Headcount of TAs (of all levels, including HLTAs)	Primary	Secondary
0-5	0	5
6-10	6	4
11-20	15	15
21-30	5	5
31-40	3	0
40 plus	1	1
Total Number employed	516	406

It was observed that TA numbers were highest in schools with larger numbers of pupils on roll, and higher numbers of specific pupil cohorts, such as those with EHC plans (formerly pupils with a statement of SEN), on SEN Support or with EAL, for example.

Of the 60 schools interviewed:

- 30 schools were employing at least one Higher Level Teaching Assistant (HLTA), with 80 HLTAs being employed in total. Of these, 51 were working in primary schools and 29 in secondary schools.
- 19 schools reported that they currently had TA vacancies - 12 vacancies were in 8 primary schools and 27.5 posts were vacant in 11 secondary schools.

- 12 schools reported that they were using temporary TA staff, made up of 6 primary schools and 6 secondary schools.
- The two schools with the lowest number of TAs (0.25 and 0.5) were state-funded selective grammar schools. Although both schools had a very small number of pupils with SEND (including visual impairment and medical conditions), the schools reported that these pupils required minimal additional support for teaching and learning.

School respondents reported that TAs were a mix of full-time staff and part-time staff, who were in school for either part of the day or part of the week.

Out of the total number of 922 TAs, it was reported that:

- 245 were whole-class based – deployed to provide extra support to the whole class (all in primary schools).
- 496 were specifically deployed for in-class learning support for pupils with SEND (187 in primary and 309 in secondary).
- 67 were described as primarily deployed for delivering interventions (21 in primary schools and 46 in secondary).
- 16 were deployed for supporting pupils with EAL, and 10 for LAC. Of these 26, 10 were in primary schools and 16 in secondary. These TAs were in schools with significant cohorts of pupils with EAL or who were LAC or post-LAC.

The remainder were either used predominantly to support other different groups of pupils, or were HLTAs used for lesson cover and other tasks across a range of pupils.

Interviewees reported that individual TAs often worked across these roles. In terms of the way they *primarily* allocated their TAs:

Primary

- Nearly all school interviewees reported allocating TAs in a primarily whole-class role.
- A majority reported also allocating TAs to in-class support for pupils with barriers to learning (including SEND, facing disadvantage and other factors described in more detail below, including what schools described as ‘not school-ready’).
- Almost half of schools allocated TAs with a primary role of intervention delivery.

Secondary

- Nearly all schools interviewed reported allocating TAs with a primary role of in-class targeted support.
- Over a third also allocated TAs with a primary role of intervention delivery.

In primary schools TAs were reported as being referred to as ‘Teaching Assistants’. However, in secondary schools there was a split in reports – with some referred to as

TAs, others Learning Support Assistants and, in fewer cases, Learning Mentors or Personal Assistants (where pupils with severe needs had a designated TA with them all of the time).

Issues affecting the reliability of figures reported

In addition to numbers being based on respondent recall, the number of TAs is reported as headcount i.e. the number of individuals employed and in what function. Interviews with schools revealed a range of factors that have a bearing on the way figures are reported by schools and that would need to be taken into account when interpreting findings:

- As schools reported based on headcount, calculating the number of TAs employed as full-time equivalents is complicated due to the different nature of TA contracts and variation in the ways schools calculate pro rata (further detail is provided in section 5).
- The focus of this study was from year one upwards. When reporting numbers of TAs, primary schools were asked to take out TA staff used solely for nursery pupils. There is a statutory requirement for staff to pupil ratios in the Early Years Foundation Stage of 1:8. Most primary schools were able to provide numbers without including nursery staff. A small proportion were not, because staff performed multiple functions in nursery and across the rest of the school, and so they are included in headcount figures.
- Roles reported as being undertaken by TAs could overlap. This meant one person could be allocated to undertake several roles, or more than one member of staff could staff a single role.
- Job titles may not necessarily reflect actual deployment and tasks undertaken. For example, a 'one-to-one TA for SEND' may be appointed to a specific pupil with SEND but in practice, the TA may work more fluidly in the classroom (further detail in this section).
- A small number of schools interviewed were mainstream schools with specialist provision and higher numbers of TAs.

Models of deployment

There was a clear difference in the model of TA deployment by school phase. This section describes the deployment models reported by participating schools. In particular, it outlines schools' general rationale for their deployment, which pupils they are supporting and what specific tasks they are carrying out. Further detail on the reported factors affecting the methods of deployment is provided in Section 4.

Respondents from participating schools reported that TAs were being deployed to support teaching and learning in in three broad ways:

1. Whole-class support;
2. Targeted in-class learning support;
3. Targeted intervention delivery.

In primary schools, it was reported that TAs were performing all three of these roles – the highest number of TAs being used for whole-class support. In secondary schools, it was reported that TAs were being used for targeted in-class support and intervention delivery, not as a general support for all pupils like with the whole-class support role used by primary schools. In some cases, schools in both phases reported that individual TAs held more than one of these roles.

Whole-class support

What are TAs doing?

In primary schools, nearly all schools reported that TAs were being deployed to work with a whole class. This meant the TA was acting as an ‘extra pair of hands’ to support all children in the class. Respondents spoke of the need for this to be for every class, although resourcing did not always allow for this (see section 5).

Based on their experience of teaching and child development, the majority of primary school respondents reported that class-based TAs were crucial to support teachers. This was in order to provide for the wide range of needs and abilities in a class of 30 plus young children. TAs were reported by respondents as providing an invaluable, cost-effective, extra staff member to facilitate a number of functions, including:

- More frequent adult: child interaction and contact.
- Supporting individual primary-aged children considered to be ‘not school ready’ and requiring additional input to get them to the same stage as their peers (for example, to develop speech and communication skills, toileting and mobility - not associated with a SEND) in order to access the key stage 1 curriculum.
- Safe staffing levels where all children are monitored.
- Managing the needs within mixed-age classes, where they existed.
- Support and stretch for the least and most able pupils¹.

With whom?

Respondents from participating primary schools reported that teachers and TAs work with different groups of pupils throughout a lesson. These groups may be based on pupil ability, with the allocation of adult staff (teacher and TA) to different ability groups being rotated. This means pupils of all abilities get some time with a teacher and some time

¹ References to pupil ability, such as ‘more/less able’ or ‘higher/lower ability’ are reported in the way respondents reported in interviews.

with a TA. For example, by the teacher working with one group of lower ability pupils, while the TA supports the higher attaining pupils, or both staff circulating around all groups throughout a lesson.

Tasks

It was reported that TAs were providing in-class support to allow pupils to access the class lesson. Examples of roles performed by whole-class TAs provided by schools included:

- Using scaffolding, prompting, clueing and modelling².
- Providing feedback or explaining feedback and marking that was written by the teacher. Many schools reported that they had a focus on feedback as part of the school development plan and were using TAs to support their approach to this.
- Structuring the class work in a different way; for example, by breaking tasks down into smaller steps or by presenting tasks in a different, more appropriate way for the pupils.
- Personalising the learning to the needs of the child by differentiating, recapping, questioning, and adapting teacher delivered content.
- Maintaining focus and supporting positive behaviour among pupils.

In some cases, schools reported that TAs were not based with the whole class for the entire day. For example, some primary schools reported timetabling certain core lessons, such as literacy and numeracy, during the morning, allowing TAs to carry out other tasks in the afternoon. However, other primary schools felt there was a need for this additional input all day.

² **Self-scaffolding** - Self-scaffolding represents the highest level of pupil independence. TAs observe, giving pupils time for processing and thinking. Self-scaffolders can: plan how to approach a task; problem-solve as they go; and review how they approached a task. **Prompting** - TAs provide prompts when pupils are unable to self-scaffold. Prompts encourage pupils to draw on their own knowledge, but refrain from specifying a strategy. The aim is to nudge pupils into deploying a self-scaffolding technique. For example: 'What do you need to do first?'; 'What's your plan?'; 'You can do this!' - **Clueing** - Often pupils know the strategies or knowledge required to solve a problem, but find it difficult to call them to mind. Clues worded as questions provide a hint in the right direction. The answer must contain a key piece of information to help pupils work out how to move forward. Always start with a small clue. **Modelling** - Prompts and clues can be ineffective when pupils encounter a task that requires a new skill or strategy. TAs, as confident and competent experts, can model while pupils actively watch and listen. Pupils should try the same step for themselves immediately afterwards. (Bosanquet et al. 2016).

Targeted in-class support

What are TAs doing?

The most common mode of deployment of TAs reported in participating secondary schools, and the second most utilised in participating in primary schools, was targeted in-class support³.

Typically, the model of deployment for targeted in-class TA support reported by participating primary and secondary schools was to provide support for pupils with SEND or pupils who have other barriers to learning. The most common use was to provide the additional support for those with EHC plans, in hours where this was stipulated.

Secondary school respondents explained that they felt TAs were needed to provide statutory hours of additional support set out for learners with EHC plans, and, where possible, to support other pupils with identified barriers to learning. This was seen as needed to help them keep pace with the curriculum (which was often regarded as more academically challenging) and, as some respondents identified, for the schools' performance results to reflect that all pupils were making good levels of progress.

The specific needs of pupils with EHC plans, discussed in interviews, covered every type and level of need; i.e. cognitive and learning, language and communication, sensory and physical and Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH). Most commonly, pupils with EHC plans were reported as having Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD), Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), severe cognitive and global delay, dyslexia, Down Syndrome, Visual or Hearing Impairment, and severe anxiety, attachment issues and depression. These diagnoses often meant that pupils had associated issues with concentration and functioning, behaviour, mobility and were in need of medical intervention. TAs were seen as responsible for catering for all of these needs.

In a smaller number of cases, schools reported that TAs were providing targeted in-class support for cohorts of pupils with EAL or looked after/post-LAC. TAs were employed to work with these cohorts in schools where there were significant proportions of pupils with EAL needs or greater numbers of LAC and these issues were seen as causing barriers to learning.

In practice, there were several examples across both phases of provision where, although 'tasked' to work with specific 'target' pupils and cohorts, TAs were working much more fluidly across a wider range of pupils of all abilities. This was to allow the

³ However, in reality, day-to-day practice is much more nuanced than this and schools report TAs undertaking a combination of tasks and roles.

teacher to input across the range of pupils in class, including to work with pupils with SEND.

How?

Schools reported targeted in-class support involved supporting individual or small groups of pupils within the classroom or in break out spaces.

Among schools that reported using this model, there was variation in how this support was arranged. It was reported that TAs performing this role were allocated either to:

- Individual pupils – often those with EHC plans with complex, severe or medical needs (although many schools discussed how they varied which TA worked with which learner to prevent the development of dependency on one adult).
- Cohorts of pupils – all identified as requiring additional support to access the whole class learning.
- Specific classes or year groups - where greater levels of needs had been identified.

This allocation depended on which pupils with which types of needs schools had, the level of resource and capacity available and what they had decided was the best way to deploy their TA support staff.

Most respondents in schools adopting this model of deployment reported being aware of the issues around having an adult “stuck to” or shadowing particular pupils. They stated that the role of the TA was not to ‘do for’ the student but to foster independence and self-confidence.

“We don’t Velcro TAs to the child so the TA doesn’t follow child around.” (Assistant Headteacher, Secondary School)

Most schools using this approach spoke about how in-class support may be provided at a distance, or that the TA was to regularly check back in with the student or groups of pupils, while “floating” in the class or providing support to a wider group of pupils.

In most cases, school respondents were clear that the progress of all pupils remained the responsibility of the class teacher and it was the teacher’s role to identify which pupils required which additional teaching and learning input and to differentiate content being delivered. However, there were also reports that TAs were differentiating tasks (in some cases because of their knowledge and expertise of certain types of SEND) and, in a minority of schools, that pupils with SEND were being taught curriculum at a different level by the TA within the mainstream classroom.

Unlike in primary schools, where pupils are generally based in the same classroom throughout the day, secondary schools were generally adopting one of two models for targeted in-class TA allocation. This was due to the fact that pupils move about the school and have different teachers throughout the day. These models were:

- Subject-based allocation - distributing TAs to a subject area/department (e.g. to support different pupils for all of their maths lessons, or across all their humanities lessons).
- Cohort/pupil-based allocation - designating TAs to work with certain pupils and therefore working with them across a range of subjects.

With whom?

The TA resource being used for targeted in-class support was allocated to:

- Pupils with an EHC plan first and foremost - as these pupils have a statutory requirement for additional input and some may need one-to-one support for a stated number of hours.
- SEN support pupils.
- Other pupils with barriers to learning including pupils with EAL, LAC or post-LAC pupils, and those facing disadvantage (usually described as those who attract pupil premium funding). Pupil premium pupils were generally only receiving TA input if schools had small numbers of other cohorts of pupils listed above, or they could easily include such pupils in relevant support already being provided for other cohorts.

Tasks

Schools using this mode of deployment reported that TAs were providing targeted in-class support to allow pupils with barriers to learning to access the class lesson, by using the same strategies as whole-class TAs and additional strategies. Some examples cited by these schools included:

- Managing anxiety and behaviour, including using coping strategies that could also involve withdrawal from the class.
- Providing and adapting resources and supporting the use of assistive technology (for example, software to support reading or scribing).
- Providing the curriculum at a different level e.g. appropriate to cognitive level versus chronological age.
- Meeting medical and personal care needs, where pupils required it - e.g. administering medication to those with diabetes, changing a Hickman line or cleaning a tracheostomy, taking pupils to the toilet / changing nappies (both at primary and secondary).
- Supporting mobility, where pupils required it – mobility issues for secondary aged pupils often meant they needed TA help to regularly move between lessons and travel around the school. For primary aged children, it was needed for play and lunch times as well as non-seated activities in the class.

Out-of-class targeted interventions

Over a half of TAs in primary schools and over a third of TAs in secondary school were reported as having a primary role of delivering targeted interventions in their school. This involved providing focused input for specific pupils. These were delivered as additional input, for example during general form time or lunch breaks, or as alternative input, for example, by withdrawing pupils from a lesson.

With whom?

Among schools who reported using this mode of deployment, TAs were most commonly delivering interventions for pupils with EHC plans or, in some cases those on the SEN register. However, where schools had significant pupil cohorts, TAs were also reported delivering interventions for pupils with EAL, LAC and post-LAC pupils, and in some cases other vulnerable learners such as those with emerging, or considered at risk of developing SEMH issues and those who attracted pupil premium funding. Interventions were seen among these schools as a way to 'lessen the gap' in attainment. Several schools interviewed said that they assessed all pupils on entry, in order to identify who may need which type of intervention. In other schools, this assessment was based on previous assessment scores (such as KS2 results), progress data or teacher and/or SENCO in-year identification.

What are TAs doing?

In terms of out-of-class intervention delivery among schools using this mode of deployment, TAs were being tasked with delivering a variety of interventions. Indeed, schools reported employing a wide range of interventions to address a wide range of issues often within the same school. These included (with examples cited where used in several schools) the following interventions:

- A. Interventions to support learning in-class, or specifically for literacy and numeracy:
- Pre-teaching and over learning⁴, and catch up or keep up⁵.
 - Recap of content covered in class.
 - Extra teaching on literacy and numeracy.

⁴ Pre and over-learning involves exposing the student to words and ideas that are about to come up in the lesson, and going over them again after the lesson.

⁵ The term "catch-up" is a widely used educational term. It refers to help that schools provide for pupils who did not achieve the expected standard for their age (e.g. in reading or mathematics) or, to raise the achievement of disadvantaged pupils and to close the gaps between them and their peers. The term "keep-up" is similar but may reflect an ethos and/or practices that aim not to let pupils fall behind in the first place. For instance, catch up with someone means to draw level coming from behind. To keep up with someone means that you are virtually level with him. Keep up interventions may be those happening on the same day as lessons were taught.

- Evidence based interventions e.g. Accelerated Reader, Read Write Inc, First for Maths, or Precision Teaching.
- B. Interventions to support areas of special educational need:
- Speech and language support - such as that designed by a speech and language therapist for school staff to follow.
 - Social emotional support and nurture groups - such as The Boxall Profile⁶, the ELSA (Emotional literacy) programme⁷, or social stories⁸.
 - Sensory support - such as taking pupils to a quiet or calming room.
 - Input to achieve other specific targets/address areas of need, where required e.g. delivering interventions set out by physiotherapy or occupational therapy professionals.
- C. Interventions to support inclusion and independence:
- Helping the child with organisation and preparation.
 - Study skills.
- D. Extra help for (predominantly in secondary schools):
- Homework.
 - Exam revision.

How much and how?

Schools across both phases varied in their belief about, and therefore approaches to, delivering intervention support to pupils and withdrawal. Although it is not possible to explicitly quantify because of the way schools were questioned, across the sample there were examples of schools who:

- Delivered *no* interventions, instead delivering all support using the targeted in-class approach. This approach was often used because these schools had found that, although the target skill was developed by an intervention, this did not necessarily translate to the wider curriculum or learning.
- Allocated *little* targeted TA in-class support - preferring to train, advise and support

⁶ The Boxall Profile is an assessment tool for social emotional and behavioural difficulties for children and young people (see: <https://boxallprofile.org>).

⁷ ELSA is an educational psychology developed intervention for promoting the emotional wellbeing of children and young people, delivered by trained support staff (see: <https://www.elsanetwork.org>). It covers issues such as bereavement, social skills, self-esteem, anger management, and friendships.

⁸ Social Stories are a concept used to improve the social skills of pupils such as those with autistic spectrum disorders (ASD). Social stories are used to educate and as praise.

teachers to better differentiate and make reasonable adjustments in lessons. TAs then delivered interventions in non-taught times to help pupils catch or keep up, or to address specific additional needs.

- Provided in-class TA support for *all* lessons, as well as delivering targeted interventions by TAs during non-taught times (such as tutor or form time, or lunch and break times).
- Supported pupils with TAs in-class *most* of the time but withdrew specific pupils from certain subjects. Examples of subjects they were withdrawn from included modern foreign languages (MFL) or, English/literacy or maths/numeracy – in circumstances in which it was felt these pupils could not access content from the mainstream lessons.
- Withdrew pupils with more complex needs, often those with Autistic Spectrum Disorders (ASD) or cognitive deficit (commonly reported in schools who have pupils with such needs). This time was spent being supported by a TA in an enhanced provision or a resource base.

Use of withdrawal was also influenced by external factors, such as resource and pupil cohorts.

Interventions were most often delivered in small groups, or in some cases one-to-one. They took place in break out spaces, in nurture rooms or resource bases where schools had these.

Schools spoke about the importance of withdrawing pupils from as little mainstream teaching as possible. This meant that they tried to vary any lessons or subjects that pupils were withdrawn from, and tried to avoid subjects that pupils enjoyed. Some schools reported that pupils received interventions during subjects that they found especially challenging, due to their needs, and/or that they disengaged from.

In a minority of schools pupils were reported as spending prolonged periods receiving intensive TA-delivered interventions, or being withdrawn from mainstream classes due to their needs. For example, pupils with EAL may have received an intensive period of teaching in English, or of subjects in their home language, before they were considered ready to join in mainstream classes. Likewise, some pupils with SEND, usually those with EHC plans, were considered less able to progress in mainstream lessons and so they spent longer periods in a resource base or nurture setting where a more appropriate type and level of curriculum could be delivered.

Schools reported monitoring impacts of interventions (in terms of change in assessment scores, or progress data) but identified the difficulty of proving the impact of the TA input separate from other influential factors (such as the teacher).

The majority of schools, across both phases, spoke of referring to the Education Endowment Fund (EEF) Toolkit (Sharples, Webster and Blatchford, 2015) for ideas of

interventions to use. Schools often had a bank of interventions they regularly used because they believed them to be successful and meet the needs of their pupils.

Factors affecting TA allocation

Some schools reported that the allocation of TAs, for both targeted in-class support and intervention delivery, might be:

- Determined by pupil assessment at the beginning of the year and therefore the TA allocation generally remained static (as they support lower attaining pupils, or those with SEND for the whole year).
- Varied in-year due to increases in the number of pupils with EHC plans in place or new joiners with EHC plans or other identified needs (such as EAL).
- Dependent on identified needs of cohorts or dips in progress suggesting that TAs be best allocated to different classes or cohorts of pupils at different points during the academic year.
- For time-limited interventions and therefore change after an intervention is delivered and targets achieved. Often interventions were discussed as running for 6-week periods.

Planning

Most schools reported allocating minimal time during the school day for TAs to plan and prepare. Typically, this was by using a small amount of time at the start and finish of the school day depending on how TAs were contracted. Some schools, mainly secondaries, reported allocating non-contact time for TA planning and preparation. They would try to align this with relevant teachers' planning, preparation and assessment (PPA) time to allow for collaborative planning. In a few cases, TAs were paid to attend non-term time sessions for planning and preparation (for example, a day before each half term).

Whereas some schools saw the importance of planning for all TA staff, others only provided planning opportunities for those who were higher skilled (not just HLTAs, but those with specialist training or qualifications) or providing support or interventions for specific cohorts of pupils, or for tasks requiring a higher level of skill or responsibility (such as providing PPA cover).

“The TAs may deliver [bought in] literacy and numeracy interventions for 10 minutes during form time. This is a set programme so once they are trained they don't need to plan for those intervention sessions.” SENCO, Secondary

“We have an HLTA who is an ex-teacher who delivers bespoke catch up interventions on literacy and numeracy. Time is allocated to plan and prepare those sessions.” Headteacher, Primary

The type of planning expected of TAs varied. Whereas some schools expected them to plan teaching and how they would work collaboratively with teaching staff, others felt they

only needed to ensure they had the appropriate resources to support a lesson, or to have knowledge of which pupils they were to support. Therefore, what schools referred to as 'planning', ranged from quick informal conversations with teachers, preparing resources, and reading support plans through to attending staff meetings and devising curriculum content to deliver at a different level.

TA job titles and levels

Most schools indicated that they were employing TAs at different levels or tiers. This was often commensurate with either: level of skills and qualifications (for example, a Level 3 TA might have completed a certified Teaching Assistant award at level 3); their experience (e.g. longevity of service); or the type of pupils they supported (e.g. those working with pupils with complex SEND versus those providing general classroom support).

Higher Level Teaching Assistants

The 30 schools who reported employing HLTAs were deploying these for specific functions that required an increased level of responsibility, or a particular skill set.

Among these schools, HLTAs were most frequently being used as lesson cover for teaching staff's allocated planning, preparation and assessment PPA time, most often delivering teacher-planned content. In some cases, schools reported HLTAs covering other teaching staff absences (such as sickness leave or training attendance). HLTAs were teaching these classes on their own, although usually following work plans set by the teachers.

Schools were also commonly employing HLTAs:

- To plan and deliver bespoke interventions to targeted pupils.
- For a particular specialism that they delivered to the whole class, examples cited by schools included: Sports coaching or Swimming (funded through the Sports Premium); specific input for pupils with EAL; or Spanish lessons across the school (fulfilling the compulsory foreign language subject requirement for key stage 2 pupils).

HLTAs were also, but in smaller numbers, being deployed to:

- Lead a SEND team responsible for timetabling provision, cascading training to other TAs or determining interventions to be used with particular pupils.

- Take responsibility for some of a SENCO's administrative work to free up time for other tasks. This included allocating a HLTA to test for and organise Access Arrangements⁹.
- Provide wider family support and tackle attendance issues.
- Manage or staff a school's SEN resource base.
- Deliver courses for pupils who may find it difficult to access GCSE qualifications or for learners with learning difficulties. Examples included HLTAs delivering Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN)¹⁰ or entry level qualifications in maths or science.

Unqualified teacher status

A small number of respondents reported classifying their TAs as unqualified teaching staff. This meant they could be used to deliver teaching to small groups (most often lower ability cohorts) or provide PPA cover.

Among this small group, respondents reported that such TAs were those who were looking to train as teachers in the future and so were getting 'classroom experience'. These schools spoke of supporting TAs to move onto initial teacher training.

Apprentice TAs

A very small number of school respondents reported employing Apprentice TAs¹¹. These TAs were reported as being deployed in the same way as other TAs, but were relatively young, less qualified and/or experienced and less expensive to employ. In some cases, this was seen by schools using this route as a way of recruiting more TA staff.

Other support staff

In addition to TAs, some respondents said they were employing or buying-in other support staff to support specific cohorts of pupils. This included specialist teachers of for deaf and/or Visually Impaired pupils, speech and language therapists, educational psychologists, physio and occupational therapists, and EAL specialists.

⁹ Access Arrangements are pre-examination adjustments for candidates, based on evidence of need and normal ways of working.

¹⁰ Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network - qualifications to help young people develop knowledge and skills for learning, work and life.

¹¹ A TA apprenticeship is a training programme that lasts around 60 weeks, in which participants learn how to support the improvement of teaching and learning in schools. During the course, they help set up the classroom, supervise pupils and support them in their work, among other tasks.

Some respondents also reported employing learning mentors to support pupils with wider issues underpinning abilities to progress in classroom learning, such as providing family support and signposting.

Secondary schools often reported having an additional team of support staff for pastoral or behaviour support, or, to support pupils with SEMH.

Wide-ranging additional tasks

In addition to whole-class, in-class support and intervention delivery, the research found that TAs were providing a wide range of other 'school support' tasks.

These fell into three broad categories - with examples from specific schools highlighted:

1. Additional tasks for pupils with SEND (commonly carried out by, but not limited to, TAs who were delivering in-class support and interventions for pupils with SEND) - examples of which included:
 - Gathering evidence of needs, progress and family circumstances for SEND assessments/EHC plan applications.
 - Recording data and target setting as part of Individual Education Planning development for pupils with SEND.
 - Preparing resources for particular pupils (such as enlarging work for a child with visual impairment).
 - Staffing the lunch/break time sanctuary for pupils with SEND.
 - Administrative support to the school SENCO.

Carrying out these tasks was very common amongst TAs who were tasked with supporting pupils with SEND.
2. Fulfilling wider roles within the school - examples of which included:
 - Running breakfast and after school clubs, and enrichment activities - TAs were carrying this out in many schools across both phases.
 - Providing lunch cover – this was reported frequently
 - Accompanying pupils to sports activities and events.
 - Carrying out family liaison/handover.
 - Providing family support and safeguarding.
 - Exam invigilation (reported in selected secondary schools).
 - Being the designated first aider (reported in selected primary schools).
3. Providing a resource to tidy classrooms, put up displays and undertake general administrative tasks e.g. organising book bags, printing resources.

The first two categories of support were most common. However, using TAs as 'an extra pair of hands' was not routinely reported by schools interviewed. When it was mentioned, this was most often in primary schools.

Section 3: Recruitment, contracts, management and training of TAs

This section sets out findings from the 60 interviews on TA contracts, their management, recruitment and training.

Contracts

TA contractual arrangements varied between but also, in some cases, within schools. These variations include:

- Full-time or part-time: It was very common for schools to report having moved from employing lots of part-time TAs, often working for specific hours with specific pupils, to permanently employing a smaller core team of TAs who instead work across the school with a wider range of pupils and/or subject areas.
- Permanent or temporary status: The majority of TA staff in schools interviewed were reported to be on permanent contracts (with some schools reporting that some had been set up many years ago). There were cases where schools reported they were recruiting staff on temporary contracts. Schools with TAs employed on temporary contracts reported TAs being recruited either through agencies, by building up a bank of TA staff (who they could call on at short notice), or being recent graduates (looking for experience in schools and who schools anticipated may not be retained in the long term). Of the small number of schools using agency staff, some reported that agency staff were poorly skilled, not as experienced in supporting pupils with SEND as their CVs implied, and costly to employ. It was for these reasons that some schools reported setting up their own bank of TA staff – because they knew and trusted them and they were cheaper as agency fees did not have to be paid. Among schools using temporary staff, reasons for this included: to cover absence; to meet specific needs; to deal with in-year changes in cohorts e.g. to provide cover for a child new to the school with high needs; and to prevent permanent contracts (which were then difficult to terminate when school needs changed).
- Periods covered: The majority of schools reported that their TAs were on term-time only contracts, though there were some examples of TAs on all-year-round contracts.
- Hours covered: In the majority of cases TA contracts were reported by school respondents to cover the hours just before the time that pupils start their school day, to just after it has finished (e.g. 8.45 to 3.45). Many schools reported that TAs get 30 minutes for their lunch, with some schools varying when they allow TAs to take this in order to provide cover for pupils' needs during their lunch break.
- Inclusion of planning time: There was variation in whether or how planning time was set out in TAs' contracts. Whereas some schools (most often primaries) expected that any planning or preparation work would take place in the 15 minutes

TAs had at the start and end of the day, others timetabled TAs to have specific non-contact time in the day for this role. Some schools made additional payments for extra hours to be spent on planning.

- Attendance at meetings and staff training: There were only a few examples where schools interviewed report that TAs contracts included TA attendance at staff meetings and joint training events. In some cases, schools reported paying for the extra time so that TAs could attend these. Amongst these schools, it was often reported that it was important for TAs to be seen as equally valued members of staff who needed to be kept informed of, and involved in, school discussions and training. In some cases, TAs were expected to attend these sessions out of goodwill, and in others, there was no requirement or expectation that TAs would attend.
- Named pupils / specific provision: There were some cases among schools interviewed where TAs were retained on legacy contracts, which ‘tied’ them to working with individual pupils for specific hours and to carry out a particular role.
- Midday and supervision cover: In many schools (including the majority of primary schools), TAs were also used for lunch cover. Schools often explained the use of TAs as ‘lunchtime supervisors’ and ‘playground monitors’ as being beneficial as they were able to support pupils who require additional support during these times, including in ‘sanctuary spaces’ or quiet areas in secondary schools. TAs were commonly paid at a lower rate than for their normal TA hours for these times. In a very small number of schools TAs were also reported to be acting at teacher cover.
- Other additional hours: Amongst the many schools who used TAs to provide out of school hours cover, TAs were paid by the hour on top of their core salary (as discussed in section 2).

Schools reported that contractual requirements affect the degree of flexibility of support that could be provided, the quality of TA provision (including whether or not TAs were adequately informed and prepared for their role), and how efficiently schools could allocate TA resource. They reported that the greatest factor affecting these arrangements was the available funding and costs to the school.

Recruitment and Skills

Of the interviewed respondents, nineteen schools reported that they had TA vacancies they were struggling to fill (either due to lack of applicants or appropriately skilled candidates), while others reported being overwhelmed with applications – meaning that they could choose TAs best suited to their school’s needs.

Most primary respondents reported when recruiting TAs, they required GCSE qualifications in English and maths. Some felt this was not a necessary prerequisite as skills with pupils and/or particular experience supporting pupils with SEND could override

this. A small number of primary schools indicated that the TAs they had did not have the skills and abilities required to stretch and challenge high attainers in Year 6.

Secondary respondents reported higher qualification requirements for TAs (although this had not always been the case for staff recruited in the past) and often stated they expressed a preference in advertisements or the selection process for candidates with a degree. There were examples in a small number of secondary schools where all TA staff were qualified to degree level or above. A small number of schools across both phases also gave examples of how some of their TAs were qualified teachers who had decided to no longer teach.

It is of note that schools interviewed in urban areas more frequently reported that applicants for TA posts were often highly qualified and were looking to the TA role as a route into teaching. Schools were happy to support this, even though it meant a regular turnover of support staff and a need to continually train up newcomers. In some Teaching Schools and Multi-Academy Trusts interviewed, recruitment of TAs in this way was seen as a valuable pipeline for 'growing their own' teachers.

Management

Line Management

Of interviewed respondents, TAs were line managed according to their main role. For example, class-based TAs were often said to be managed by the Headteacher, year or department lead, and SEND-specific TAs were managed by the SENCO or Inclusion Manager.

A minority of secondary schools reported some tensions between SENCOs' requirements for TA deployment and those of SLT to manage resources as a whole across the school, or between a TA and class teacher on how they are best deployed. For example, in one school all TAs have also been trained as cover supervisors. This role attracts a higher rate of pay than the TA role. TAs may be called upon to provide cover supervision at short notice, for which they receive higher pay. This means the pupils with SEND they are usually supporting on that day are left unsupported. In another case, the SENCO reported constantly having to restate her claim for TA time (and additional staff) in order to meet the statutory requirements for additional support set out in EHC plans, but SLT were unwilling to provide this as they were trying to reduce whole school staffing costs.

Performance Management

Amongst the schools probed, several respondents reported that, in addition to line management, they had introduced performance management targets for TAs for example, to improve the progress and performance of pupils under their remit, progress a

student with SEND's individual education plan targets, or to evidence measurable change through baseline and end assessment of planned intervention programmes. Some schools also had targets for TAs continuing professional development (CPD).

Several schools were reported using SLT and/or SENCOs to carry out TA focussed learning walks to assess TA performance and requirements for CPD.

Training

Across interviewees, TAs were described as being trained on:

- Teaching support - including being involved in whole school training on areas such as metacognition and providing effective feedback.
- SEND – including on understanding types of SEND, possible manifestations, and support strategies.
- Particular interventions and programmes (such as those detailed in Section 2 under 'out-of-class interventions, including evidence-based bought-in interventions and professionally-devised schemes).

In many cases, schools reported that their TAs were also undergoing, or had been through, professional TA training in order to raise their 'level' that in some cases lead to increased rates of pay. Some examples were provided by schools whereby TAs had been supported to undertake HLTA training. Schools reported that training, in general, was delivered either in-house (by Department of SEN Leads, or other TA staff) or externally.

Of the schools probed to give detail, there was a split in whether schools reported that they had funded such training or whether TAs were expected to cover the costs themselves. Some schools reported giving TAs time off in lieu to compensate time spent on training, while others said that they tried to timetable training during school-based hours by repeating a training session at different times during the week, so that TAs could find one they were able to attend.

Section 4: Changes in TA numbers and factors affecting decision-making around TA deployment and

Changes in TA numbers

School respondents were asked if their number of TAs had increased, decreased or remained the same over the last 2-3 years, or whether they foresaw any change in the coming academic year.

Table 4.1 Changes in TA numbers

	Primary	Secondary	Total
TA numbers increase	4	7	11
TA numbers decrease	18	20	38
TA numbers static	8	3	11

The majority of schools across both phases reported that their TA numbers had decreased in the last few years, or is likely to in the coming academic year. This included 18 of 30 primary schools and 20 of 30 secondary schools. Similar numbers of schools reported that their numbers had, or would, either remain static, or increase.

The main reason for decreases in TA numbers was cited as reduced funding by those interviewed - meaning they had had to cut staff. Some had elected to cut TAs and support staff before teaching staff, while, more commonly, other schools had chosen not to replace TAs who had left (i.e. natural attrition). In some schools, TAs had been transferred from part-time to full-time posts, resulting in a reduced headcount, and the number of pupils with EHC plans had reduced meaning that less support staff could be afforded, or were needed. In a small number of schools, the number of pupils on roll had reduced with a consequent reduction in the number of support staff required.

Increases in TA numbers were generally reported by schools as due to a substantial increase in pupil numbers. This included an increase in pupils on roll (such as a primary school growing from a one form to a two form entry) or an increased number of pupils with EHC plans. However, that is not to say that all schools experiencing large increases in numbers of pupils, or those with EHC plans, had increased their TA numbers. Several schools had had growth in pupil numbers but had not been able to increase their TA numbers in line with this.

Decision-making on TA deployment

School respondents were asked what factors were affecting and influencing their decision-making about how to deploy and allocate TAs in schools, and how this has changed over the past few years and is expected to change in the future. The main three factors that respondents reported as affecting decision-making around TA deployment included:

- Evidence and expertise.
- Pupil cohorts.
- Funding and availability of resource.

Funding and availability of resource was the most commonly reported factor affecting decision-making.

Evidence and expertise

The schools interviewed reported using a range of evidence to support or influence decisions on TA deployment. This included, in an order reflecting frequency of responses:

- The Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) report on making the best use of TAs (Sharples et al, 2015). Those interviewed often reported specifically being aware of this report. Many had seen the headline that TAs were “high cost, low impact” (which was not a wholly accurate reflection of the full contents of the report). They reported having either ignored this as they did not believe it to be true, or having had to justify to their governors or school leaders why they believed it was still important to continue using TAs and the value they added to the school.
- Guidance on how to maximise the impact of TAs and related research evidence (Blatchford et al. 2009). This had often led to moving TAs away from individual pupils and using them as more of a resource to support the development of independence.
- Advisor or consultant advice bought in to conduct TA Audits, advise on inclusion, carry out a SEND review or post-Ofsted advice.
- Research, advice and information from staff training. Examples provided included: undertaking a Masters qualification including TA use, SENCO specialisms, from mandatory training (e.g. the National Award for SEND Coordination).
- Gaining experience via local SEND networks or visits to other schools (including other mainstream and special schools, and those considered to display good performance) – several schools across both phases reported that their SENCO or TAs had visited other schools to experience different models and practices.

In addition, when asked about types of evidence used to inform TA deployment, many schools cited their use of progress data. These schools reported using pupil progress

data and formative assessment data on a routine basis to determine which pupils required which type of additional input, and the impact of interventions and actions taken.

There were examples of this evidence and information having been used by some schools. Such examples included:

- Moving from a 'Velcro' model, where a TA sticks to working with one pupil and may do their work for them, to a more inclusive approach of working with small groups of pupils and promoting independence.
- Deploying TAs to work with different groups of pupils so that teachers spend more time teaching and taking responsibility for the pupils with SEND in their classrooms, rather than solely relying on TAs to support and reinforce their learning.
- Reinforcing the approach to TA deployment they had already adopted.
- Restructuring the allocation of TAs - for example, in a number of schools, by reducing the headcount of TAs from a higher number of TAs on one-to-one part-time contracts to a smaller team of full-time TAs deployed where needed.
- Shifting the school culture and practice in the way teachers used and worked with TAs. This centred around ensuring that the class or subject teacher took responsibility for pupils with SEND, ensuring teacher responsibility in the classroom. This was also known by school respondents to be in line with the revised SEN and Disability Code of Practice introduced in September 2014, which required training for teachers and TAs. This shift in culture often involved ensuring teachers were aware of the most appropriate way to use and work with TA staff to support pupils with SEND.
- Changing from a model where TAs solely support lower-attaining pupils or individual pupils with SEND, to one in which the TA is used as a more fluid resource in the classroom across the ability range. This can enable the teacher to spend more time working with pupils who may be struggling. The deployment of TAs to support pupils across the wider ability range was more commonly reported in primary schools than secondary.
- Building in formal time for TAs to meet, plan and attend training.
- Introducing performance management and appraisals systems for TAs.

Pupil cohorts

School respondents reported TA deployment being impacted by specific pupils or pupil cohorts. In order of priority, these were:

- Pupils with EHC plans (where schools had these).
- Pupils with EAL (where schools had these).
- LAC or post-LAC pupils (where schools had these).
- Pupils on SEN support.
- Pupils with other needs, such as SEMH.

- Disadvantaged/pupil premium attracting pupils.
- In primary schools, children considered not 'school-ready'.
- In secondary schools, the pupils identified as needing Year 7 or Year 11 catch-up or intensive input.

All of these pupils were seen as needing additional support and input that could be delivered by a TA (including indirectly by freeing up teacher time). Pupils with an EHC plan were seen as the only group for whom there was a statutory requirement to provide additional support.

School respondents varied in their reports of what support they thought were required to provide for pupils with EHC plans. Schools in some local authorities, stated that the number of hours of support to be provided were written into plans, while staff from schools in other areas reported having an 'understanding' that pupils with EHC plans had a statutory number of hours of TA support that had to be provided for them (based on the level of funding provided).

“We obviously have a statutory duty to provide the 20 hours of support set out in [this child’s] EHCP, so we meet that by some in-class support and some interventions at lunch time.” Headteacher Primary school

“Obviously the LA are no longer allowed to write the actual number of hours of TA input that each pupil has to have into plans, but we know this has to align with the funding bands. So we have a few pupils who are on the top rate of funding and we know that means we’re meant to give them 25 hours a week of support. What isn’t clear is whether or not this is meant to be one-to-one or whether we can share this resource across several pupils because for that we get £4,300. If you add that to the £6k notional funding that falls quite a bit short of the £15,500 cost of a TA.”
Assistant Head/SENCO Secondary School

Schools varied in their belief or extent to which they could provide this additional support as one-to-one or personalised input. This was due to TA time being shared between several pupils with identified needs.

In most schools, the number of different cohorts that could be supported by TAs was dependent on available resource. Many schools described how they firstly provided support for pupils with EHC plans, then any with EAL or LAC (as these also attracted additional funding to meet their needs). Any remaining resource was then distributed to the other cohorts with identified needs. In some cases, schools reported that this resulted in only pupils with EHC plans receiving additional support.

Funding

All interviewed schools reported that funding had become a key driver of TA deployment in the last few years and was cited as likely to determine numbers and allocation of TAs in the coming couple of years.

Schools in almost all areas reported that their overall school budgets were reducing. This was attributed to the combination of a range of factors reported as affecting all schools:

- Reduced school budgets – schools reported being impacted by less money being passed on to them from the local authority (LA) or by the new funding formula, increased staffing costs (including teaching staff pension rises), and increased overhead costs.
- Reduced LA support – many schools reported that services which were previously provided by the LA, such as speech and language therapy, behaviour support teams, counselling and staff training, now had to be bought in by schools.
- Reduced funding attached to EHC plans – most schools reported that funding rates for additional and top-up support had been reduced by their LA. This often meant the funding attached to a pupil's EHC plan, from the school's notional SEND budget (of £6,000) and the additional LA funding (which in some cases was reported as zero) was insufficient to pay for the additional support mandated in the EHC plan. These schools therefore outlined how they had to pay the shortfall from their main school budget.
- Fewer pupils receiving EHC plans – in an effort to reduce their costs, LAs were perceived as raising the threshold of need for new EHC plan applications. Many schools felt this meant that pupils with needs, which previously would have meant they received additional funding to provide support, were no longer getting it.

Schools reports that a reduction in available funds was happening at the same time as levels and types of needs in pupils were seen as increasing. Schools detailed that this increase was due to more pupils with SEND being in the mainstream system and more pupils facing issues, which can result in barriers to learning. Examples of issues raised by schools included anxiety and mental health issues, and problems due to family circumstances.

Despite schools reporting being knowledgeable about evidence on effective TA deployment, funding was reported as having to override these considerations in many cases. This was considered to be likely to continue forward into the next couple of years based on current funding allocations (both whole school and SEND related).

Multiple examples were given across the majority of respondents where schools had made efficiency savings by:

- Not replacing TA staff when they left – this was the most commonly reported action taken to address funding issues
- Restructuring their staffing to reduce the number of TAs and increase their responsibility.
- Making TAs redundant, in a smaller number of cases.
- Using temporary staff, in several schools (and reported by some as likely to increase in the future) in order to meet current needs and, for some, to prevent severance pay from permanent contracts.

Taken together, schools overwhelmingly described how this meant that they had to make difficult decisions, or employ “creative solutions”, regarding TA deployment.

Balancing available resource and pupil needs

Respondents from across the country and in both phases of education detailed the many ways in which they were having to take decisions to balance the funding they had available with meeting the needs of the pupils in their school. Actions schools had already taken or were considering doing in the coming year included:

- Reducing the number of whole-class TAs – primary schools reported that ideally they wanted at least one TA to support every class. However, several said they had to change this to either one TA per year group, or one TA per key stage, or only to have them as whole-class TAs for part of the school day. They said that this resulted in timetabling issues (to ensure all classes could be covered) and less specialism in TA input.
- Changing whole-class support to targeted in-class support – within primary schools that reported having both a whole-class TA and one or more TAs providing in-class support within one class, some were looking at whether these roles could be merged. This resulted in the whole-class TA being tasked with supporting a cohort of learners with specific needs (instead of, or as well as, supporting all pupils in the class).
- Focusing in-class SEND support – as a result of having less TA support, many schools reported having to rearrange how this support was provided. This was done in a variety of ways, examples included:
 - Providing TA support only for pupils with EHC plans, and only for the specified (and funded) hours set out in their EHC plans.
 - Grouping cohorts of pupils with SEND so that TAs could provide input for them all together. For example, this has resulted in some schools grouping pupils with EHC plans, or on SEN Support, into one class across a year group
 - Moving away from subject-specific allocation to across subject support – even in schools where they reported seeing additional benefit of TAs being subject- or department-based (in terms of developing specialist knowledge). Some schools reported doing this incrementally by still having subject-based TAs for the core subjects of English, maths and science but not other subjects, whereas others said they had abandoned the approach all together.
 - Targeting year groups for additional support – there were a few reports where schools had decided that their limited TA resources were best focused on either Year 6 cohorts, preparing them for the transition to secondary school, Year 7 cohorts, where early input could support the rest

of the time at secondary school, or Year 11, in order to provide extra input for pupils before they took exams.

- Delivering more generic interventions – in order to meet the needs of a wider range of pupils (such as all of those not making sufficient progress due to SEND, SEMH, EAL, or other disadvantage) some schools reported delivering interventions which they believed were of most benefit to the majority of pupils, rather than addressing specific needs of smaller numbers of pupils.
- Reducing planning and other non-contact time – in order to meet increasing needs several schools reported that they had to reduce the amount of planning and preparation time available to TAs, as well as time spent on training. This was in an effort to maximise the amount of contact and support they could deliver.
- Widening the TA role –some schools reported having to do more with less. This meant that if they wanted to continue to offer breakfast and after school clubs, enrichment activities and outdoor learning, they were having to use TAs to staff and support this (rather than incurring the costs of buying this in, or getting teaching staff to provide it).

School respondents across both phases and across the country reported a growing tension around what they could afford to deliver in terms of TA support. Interviewees reported the various impacts of this, including:

- Schools felt that they could not provide the type and level of additional input they would want to for all of their pupils who needed it.
- Concerns that pupils with EHC plans were not necessarily getting fully personalised TA input tailored to their specific needs. This was due to the TA working with several pupils with different needs at once. Some schools specifically reported concerns they were not meeting their statutory obligations. A number of school leaders and SENCOs also reported having ‘uncomfortable conversations’ with parents of children with an EHC plan about use of their child’s personal budget. It is allocated to meet the needs of their child but in reality it is being ‘spent’ across a range of other pupils.
- TAs were increasingly only being deployed to support pupils with EHC plans, meaning they were no longer able to work, or intervene early, with other pupils with identified needs such as the SEN support cohort, or those with anxiety and mental health issues. Some schools raised concerns that these pupils were missing out on support, but also that bigger issues could be building up for the future.
- A small number of schools were having to consider whether they could provide a safe and appropriate (in terms of being able to fully access the curriculum and not preventing other pupils from learning) place for pupils with EHC plans, and therefore considering whether or not to offer a school place to these pupils.
- An increase in the number of pupils with SEND has meant that funding to resource TAs had to be taken from the support and activities for all other pupils (with

schools noting that the notional SEND budget and LA top up was insufficient to meet costs).

- Some schools say they are deliberately trying to attract particular cohorts for whom ring-fenced funding is allocated. This is so that they can continue to afford and increase their TA numbers.

“We are actively looking to attract more pupils with EAL, as they bring in additional funding and are relatively easy to evidence progress with.” SENCO, Secondary school

“Our school has made it clear to the Local Authority that we are happy to take on more LAC and post-LACs. Their funding allocation is quite generous compared to that of pupils with EHC plans. And much of the support we’re giving to the LACs, such as SEMH interventions or home work club, we can include other pupils with SEND in.” Headteacher, Secondary school

- Limiting the times for planning and preparation for TAs as they were being stretched across more pupils and tasks.

Section 5: Benefits and challenges of TA deployment

Schools were asked to detail the benefits and challenges of having TAs in their school, and more general reflections on their role within the Education sector. The benefits and challenges cited below are based on the responses given by the headteachers or nominee interviewed, rather than teachers, TAs or pupils themselves.

Benefits

Schools respondents outlined what they perceived to be the wide-ranging benefits of TA use in schools, for pupils, teachers and the school more widely.

According to school respondents, who were often not themselves teaching staff, examples of benefits of TAs for teachers included:

- Support to ensure pupils benefit from the learning activities planned by the teacher, by TAs differentiating content, keeping pupils on task and ensuring understanding.
- Classroom management - it was highlighted by many schools that sometimes a teacher may find it difficult to manage the classroom activities on their own. This is especially the case when the teacher has many pupils under their care or when there are mixed-aged classes, such as in a primary school, or in secondary school where a pupil's challenges to learning might impact on the learning of other pupils. Having an extra person in the room was seen as making it easier to organise learning, split pupils into different groups of needs and devise input needed from the available adults.
- Supporting teacher workload - several schools reported that they had surveyed teachers on how TAs supported them. Among these schools, they said that teachers were likely to highlight the presence of TAs as a positive benefit to their workload.
- Behaviour management – some schools reported that teachers benefited from having more staff in class and, in some cases, allowing a pupil to be given time out, if required.

For pupils who received support, examples of benefits reported by schools included:

- Supporting progress and attainment.
- Developing independence - for example, through the use of assistive technology, securing more effective behaviours for learning and fostering organisational skills.
- Providing more opportunities for adult:child interaction – either through more teacher or TA time.
- Provision of nurture programmes, enrichment and activities to support them to manage and cope with their challenges to learning.
- Developing a safe and trusted relationship with an adult.

For schools more widely, examples of benefits reported by respondents included:

- A cost-effective means to secure safe staffing levels within lessons, for activities such as swimming, and for more innovative provision, such as outdoor learning.
- A way of ensuring pupils with SEND can attend their local school.
- An additional and cost-effective resource for providing PPA and cover supervision.
- Provision of an additional adult to support other school duties, such as wraparound care provision and safeguarding.

Senior respondents referred to TAs in positive terms. They described them as “integral to pupils’ learning and well-being”, “the engine of the school”, and “the cloth that binds us all together”. Teachers were seen by school respondents (although teachers themselves were not interviewed) to value TAs very highly, in terms of the support they provide to them and the way they facilitate learning for all in the classroom. This had been illustrated through teaching staff consultation and reactions to proposed reductions to TA numbers.

Challenges

School-based

School staff interviewed reported three main challenges related to TA deployment in school. These were:

- Covering sickness/absence - this was both in terms of covering TA absence (for sickness and training) and teacher absence. TA staffing was described as being at minimal levels for most schools. If a TA was absent then there was not often sufficient resource to cover this, meaning a child or group of pupils could be left unsupported. Some schools reported TAs being deployed as a cost-effective resource for cover supervision. While other schools specifically reported tensions arising from TAs being asked to provide emergency cover supervision, in place of their scheduled support for pupils with SEND.
- Limited opportunities for training - although all schools reported offering TAs some training, this was often reported as a ‘juggling act’ financially and within TA contracted time. Some schools wanted to benefit from the investment they made in TA training. Others were happy to take higher skilled staff, train them up and accept higher turnover rates, for example by employing recent graduates.
- Recruitment - for some schools, securing staff with the necessary skills was identified as a challenge. Nineteen schools reported having TA vacancies that remained unfilled (adding to 39.5 vacancies overall -12 in primary settings, 27.5 in secondary). Some schools, mainly those not in based in urban areas, specifically highlighted the issues of recruiting adequately skilled staff in TA posts.

Sector-wide

School respondents also detailed what they believed to be sector-wide challenges around TA deployment – examples of which included:

- Funding of TAs – this was the most common challenge raised by all respondents. They felt they were having to be creative or make tough decisions about where best to deploy available TA resource, as discussed in Section 4.
- Low pay was highlighted by many as a barrier to securing TAs with the level of commitment, skills and qualifications required. It was acknowledged that many TAs go above and beyond their remit for little financial recompense. This low pay was seen among these schools to reflect a lack of value for the role that TAs were performing. It was also highlighted by some schools that to achieve a viable wage, TAs often performed multiple roles within a school combining their TA role with being a lunchtime supervisor or after school club leader. This, in turn, presents logistical challenges for managing TA time and duties and securing time for training.
- Lack of career progression – most school respondents identified that TAs have very little opportunity to progress their career. Although there are potentially three levels that TAs can rise up through, it was reported that these are not linked to great increases in pay. Schools taking part in this research reported having very few HLTA roles and so the chances of TAs being able to look to progress into these are limited. These respondents described how there was very little structured professional development pathways for TAs, with the associated training and career pathways.
- Changing cultures – some senior respondents expressed concern and challenges regarding shifting class teachers' approaches to taking full responsibility for the progress of all the pupils in their classes and managing TA activities effectively. A need was also identified by some respondents to change practices so that pupils with SEND were not seen solely as the SENCO team's or an individual TA's remit and taught in a separate unit or area.
- Lack of value and respect in sector – respondents reported feeling that TAs are generally undervalued in terms of the role they perform in the education sector. TAs were often reported as working with the most vulnerable and challenging pupils in the school and providing invaluable support across their education, health and social needs. However, the funding available for SEND means that pay for TAs remains low and limits opportunities for training and professional development.
- Volume and complexity of SEND need increasing – many respondents reported that this was resulting in an increased need for additional TA input, which was not being matched by available resource.
- Struggling to meet the needs of pupils with complex SEND due to lack of appropriate specialist school provision, or delays to assessments. Several respondents highlighted a local shortage of special school places meant they were

having to accommodate pupils with complex SEND, whose needs they felt that could not fully cater for and that would not normally be provided for in mainstream school. Respondents cited this as having a significant impact on their deployment of TAs.

“The local special school has 200 places. It currently has 240 children on its roll - so we are having to take children here who we feel should be in specialist provision. Special schools are full.” Headteacher, Primary

- Changing parental attitudes – some schools had felt it a challenge to get parents used to the idea that TAs were not going to be supporting their child one-to-one on a full-time basis. This expectation was due to the type of support provided in a previous setting, in the past, or what parents felt their child’s needs required (based on interpretation of EHC and Support plans).
- Challenges arising from government policies - some schools reported that the introduction of the English Baccalaureate (EBacc)¹² had led to an increase in TA provision and support, in order to help pupils who struggle academically and with subjects they believe they will be unlikely to succeed in. Such respondents felt that schools are sacrificing alternative curriculum subjects that provide a more appropriate pathway to employment for some young people in pursuit of progress 8 and EBacc performance measures. This means these schools are having to use more TAs to support or manage pupils in class rather than supporting them in ways that they feel might better meets their needs and in which they require less support.

¹² The EBacc refers to a combination of subjects that the government thinks is important for young people to study at GCSE. It includes: English language and literature, maths, the sciences, geography or history and a language.

Section 6: Conclusions

This research has shown that TAs are being deployed for a wide range of complex and interconnected functions to support teaching and learning in mainstream primary and secondary schools in England.

The main findings of this research are:

Across both phases of education TAs are being deployed - albeit to varying degrees in the different schools consulted - to:

- Support pupils using methods and approaches adopted in school as part of whole-school strategies for development and effectiveness - such as scaffolding and providing effective feedback. Accordingly, some TAs are expected to understand and deploy effective methods for teaching and learning in the same way as the qualified teacher.
- Support in-class and/or by delivering interventions (bespoke or bought in) - in some cases with performance targets being set for progress made.
- Withdraw pupils to safe or quiet spaces or resource bases - for extra tuition or to tackle issues arising from their special educational needs (e.g. anxiety, behaviour speech and language).
- Support pupils either across the full ability range, or to focus on low attainers and those with complex SEND.
- Take lessons - this ranges from using TAs as cover supervisors overseeing lessons planned by teachers to TAs being responsible for planning and delivering a school's modern foreign language entitlement, literacy and numeracy lessons for low ability pupils or an alternative curriculum or qualifications.
- Deal with pupil's mobility, medical, health and personal care needs.

In primary schools, respondents interviewed reported that TAs are often being allocated as an extra support in the classroom to support the full attainment range, as well as being allocated to provide specific support for pupils with SEND as well as other pupils who are eligible for funding.

In secondary schools, respondents outlined that TAs are allocated mainly on the basis of SEND needs, especially pupils with EHC plans. While this is a key determinant of how and where they are positioned in the school, it does not necessarily mean that they are only working with pupils with SEND. Several secondary schools are deploying TAs more fluidly across the ability range, as are several primary schools.

All school respondents reported that they are considering how they deploy TAs inclusively so that they are not attached to one student or adversely affect independence.

The majority of respondents interviewed noted that they are minimally resourcing TAs and deploying them, from their perspective, as efficiently as possible. Many respondents

highlighted that their schools has already rationalised their TA numbers and voiced concerns about having to cut them any further. As a consequence, a large number of schools are reporting that resource for pupils with SEND, including that provided for pupils under a statutory EHC plan (some via a stated number of hours), is being shared across pupils. This was particularly the case in secondary schools.

Total school funding (reported by schools to have reduced and as being insufficient to cover the required costs of their statutory obligations in EHC plans) is seen as a key barrier negatively impacting on the effective deployment of TAs, according to schools. This is because in most cases there isn't enough to:

- Provide sufficient training - especially in whole school training and CPD.
- Allow TAs to adequately plan and prepare for lessons.
- Recompense TAs for the work they undertake and responsibilities they take on.
- Effectively cover the needs of increasing proportions of pupils with SEND in the school - which schools report can mean deploying TAs in ways they know may not be the most effective.

Others key factors impacting TA deployment and allocation highlighted in the research were pupil cohorts and evidence. In particular, senior leaders highlighted concerns about properly supporting the increasing proportions of pupils with SEND in their schools to achieve their potential.

School respondents reported being aware and concerned that the responsibility for appropriately supporting and progressing their most vulnerable learners was being given to the least educationally skilled and lowest paid members of staff.

Senior staff across the schools interviewed reported there being a need for greater support funding, better pay for TAs, greater respect for TAs within the profession, consistent professional development and nationally recognised career paths for TAs, as well as more sharing of evidence and practice in effective deployment, and how this can be achieved with limited resources.

Schools reported having to balance a range of different issues and challenges when determining how to best employ and deploy TAs who are in many cases having to work across a range of pupils, with a range of teachers and on different and competing tasks.

This research has only captured the views and reports of a select number of school leaders, and in some cases SENCOs, on TA deployment. More research is needed to:

- Determine if the way senior leaders and SENCOs intend and believe TAs are being deployed is actually translating into classroom practice, and the nuance of how this support is really being delivered.
- Capture the views of teachers and TAs themselves on how TAs are managed and deployed and the best way to organise the use of these support staff.

- Understand the best ways of sharing evidence on effective practice and how this can be made integral to informing school practice.

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Annexe

Topic guide – Deployment of Teaching Assistants in schools

As you know, ASK Research have been commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) to explore the deployment of Teaching Assistants (TAs) across a range of schools in England.

Evidence has shown that there are a high number of TAs in schools, but there is less evidence on how TAs are being deployed by schools and the reasons behind this. The DfE are seeking to understand how and why schools are deploying TAs, and the role they play in supporting teaching and learning.

In particular, we are looking to understand schools' employment of TAs, the different ways they are deployed and for what purposes, and what determines how schools decide to deploy TAs.

The interview will last approximately 35-60 minutes. There are no wrong answers, we'd just like to build up a picture of TA employment and deployment in your school setting.

Our final report will be a summary of how different schools are deploying TAs for the DfE. No schools will be named in the report and DfE will not know that you have taken part in this project.

Do you have any questions?

Are you happy to take part and for me to record our conversation (this recording will only be used by the research team and will be destroyed at the end of the project)?

The first set of questions will explore how your school employs and deploys TAs. We'll then ask about factors that affect your school's decision-making on how TAs are employed and deployed in school; finally we'll discuss any changes to TA deployment, successes and challenges to overcome.

First, though, I'd like to ask a couple of questions about your role.

- What is your role in the school? And how long have you been in this role?
- How does your role in the school relate to the employment and deployment of TAs?
- Who are TAs line managed by in your school?

A) TA deployment and allocation

1. *Approximately, how many Teaching Assistants (TAs) does your school currently employ?*

- Which roles are you including in this number? (e.g. learning mentors, Welfare support?)
- What are TAs referred to as in your school? Do you have different levels? If so, please specific.
- Is this full capacity (i.e. do you have any current TA vacancies)? How do you determine how many TAs you need in your school?

We would like to focus the rest of this interview just on the TA roles (HLTA/TA/LSA)

2. Are TAs commonly used to provide additional support to specific pupils or groups of pupils in your school? If so, to which of the following pupils or groups? How many TAs support each? How are they allocated/how is this number calculated?

- EHC plans – What types of needs do they have?
- SEN Support/ low attainers
- EAL
- LAC
- Pupil Premium
- High/Medium attainers
- Others – Please detail

3. Please describe how TAs are commonly deployed in your school.

Open question. [Probe numbers and tasks for coding]

- What activities do your TAs carry out with these cohorts of pupils? How are their time and tasks allocated?
- What sorts of activities and tasks do TAs generally undertake in your school? Does this vary throughout the academic year? Prompt: planning/preparation; assessment; teacher cover; help with particular subjects, help with particular activities (i.e. small groups or with all class), catch-up, etc.
- How do TAs assist the teacher inside and outside of the classroom? What proportion of TAs time is spent working in or out of the classroom? And on what specific tasks?
- Do TAs in your school all have the same roles and responsibilities?
- Does the role of TAs and the tasks they undertake differ from other support staff in your school? How and why?

B) Decision-making

4. Why does your school currently choose to deploy TAs in the way you've described above? What factors influence these decisions? And who is part of this decision-making process?

5. To what extent, if at all, do the following factors influence decisions about the deployment of TAs in your school?

a. Funding

- Prompt: Is it a result of overall school funding? Or funding provided for certain pupils (e.g. pupil premium, SEND pupils)? Or both?

b. Pupil cohorts

- Prompt: Is it a result of a relatively higher or lower proportion of specific pupils or groups in your school (e.g. SEND/EAL pupils)?
- Is it a result of relatively higher or lower class sizes?

c. Teacher numbers/quality

- Prompt: Are TAs being deployed to support teachers? (Prompt. reduce workload, aid recruitment/retention or aid teaching and learning) If so, in what ways? And is it for any teachers in particular (e.g. Early Career Teachers)?

d. Evidence/Advice on deployment of TAs

- Prompt: What evidence are you referring to? What was your interpretation of this research? And how is this being applied in your school?
- Who advised you? Why did you use them? Was their advice based on particular evidence?
- Does your school measure the effectiveness of TAs? If so, how?

e. Skill-set of particular TAs

- Prompt: Are TAs deployed based on their skill-set (e.g. SEND or EAL)?
- What are the reasons for recruiting particular TAs? Prompt: have a skill-set (e.g. SEND or EAL) or due to resource...

6. Specific to your employment of TAs in schools...

- Generally, how are TAs employed in your school? Prompt: full-time, part-time, set hours, with specific pupils or on set tasks
- Is any professional development provided to TAs in your school? If so, what, by whom and how?
- Has your school supported TAs to become teachers? Is this a common occurrence?

C) Reflections on TA deployment and allocation

7. Has the number and/or way you deploy TAs changed over the last years?

- If so, how? And why?
- Have changes to the way your school is funded affected decisions around how TAs are deployed in your school? *Prompt: overall school funding and student specific funding (e.g. pupil premium)*
- Do you have/have you had any issues with funding TAs? What actions did you take? How was this overcome? Is this likely to change in the future? Why?

8. What do you think are the benefits and challenges of having TAs in your school?

- How do they support teaching and learning?

- What helps and hinders the impact of TAs on pupils and teachers? Probe: on pupil attainment and development, on teacher/staff workload, skill sets, funding

9. *Is there anything else you would like to feed back to the DfE about your use of TAs?*

Thank and close.



Department
for Education

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Reference: DFE- RR939

ISBN: 978-1-83870-033-1

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